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STATE FOR WHA/PDA (JGREENBLATT); WHA/CEN

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON DRUG TRAFFICKING, JULY 17, 2003

1. Editorial in Tegucigalpa-based moderate daily "El Herald" on 7/17 entitled "National security and narco trafficking". "Drug trafficking and organized crime which have recently established criminal networks in Honduras, closely related to criminal bands in Colombia, have evidenced that the Honduran state doesn't enforce law and neither does it have control over its territory and its population, particularly in the departments of Olancho, Gracias a Dios and Colon."

"It's a fact that the society and the state are being threatened. the notion of national security that involved a blatant violation of fundamental human rights in the past should be reoriented toward its true meaning: the defense of the common well being, protect the population's health and life, the environment and social cohesion which are being seriously jeopardized by the advance of the globalization of crime."

2. Article in Tegucigalpa-based moderate daily "El Herald" on 7/17 entitled "Gigantic cocaine seizure". "Police authorities seized about 2,300 kilos of cocaine in a freighter near Roatan."

"The Minister of Security Oscar Alvarez said that this seizure proved once more that the current authorities are determined to fight against drug trafficking."

"For months, the US Ambassador Larry Palmer has highlighted the scarce results Honduras has achieved in the fight against drug trafficking, and a few days ago he affirmed that the country was on the way to become a narco state. Alvarez stated, 'we are sending a clear and compelling message that drug traffickers shouldn't dare to turn Honduras into a narco state, and I'm sure that we are still far from this situation'."

"Alvarez said that he had talked to the US Ambassador Larry Palmer, expressing his satisfaction because President Maduro is proving his will to directly fight against this threat."

3. Article in Tegucigalpa-based moderate daily "El Herald" on 7/17 entitled "The Public Ministry is investigating the ten most important narcos". "Roy Medina, head of the Public Ministry, confirmed that ten leaders of the narco trafficking cartels operating in Honduras are being investigated by this institution."

"Medina affirmed, 'We are already getting some results, everyone knows about the case in San Esteban, Olancho where we arrested nine people, including a Congressman and we are also investigating the case of the cocaine shipment found in Utila this week. however, until we finish the prosecution process, we will disclose the names of those responsible of these acts'."

Palmer